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OES/STC (PBATES); OES/IHA (DSINGER AND NCOMELLA)  
BANGKOK FOR RMO, CDC, USAID/RDM/A (MFRIEDMAN)  
USDA FOR FAS/PASS TO APHIS  
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FOR OSD/ISA/AP (LSTERN)  
USAID FOR ANE AND GH (DCAROLL, SCLEMENTS AND PCHAPLIN)  
STATE PASS USTR (ELENA BRYAN)  
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SUBJECT: VIETNAM: AVIAN INFLUENZA WEEKLY REPORT FOR NOVEMBER  
17, 2005

REF: Hanoi 3009 and previous

11. (U) Summary. While local press reported several possible human AI cases this week, there have been no confirmed cases and no AI deaths since the October 29 death reported in Reftel. The GVN's Pasteur Institute of Ho Chi Minh City released information suggesting possible mutation of the H5N1 virus, but these reports have not been confirmed. The Government of Vietnam (GVN) aggressively stepped up its AI prevention program this week on a number of fronts. Hanoi officials ordered the killing of all inner-city fowl and a thorough inspection campaign beginning Nov. 17. Sale and transport of chicken (and possibly eggs) in Hanoi appears to also been banned. Hanoi, HCMC, Hue and Haiphong have banned family and small scale poultry raising. End Summary

#### No New Confirmed AI Human Fatalities

12. (U) There have been no confirmed AI human fatalities since the October 29 death of a Hanoi man reported in Reftel. Press articles this week reported circumstances of seven possible AI human cases located in Hanoi, Haiphong, Bac Giang Province, and Quang Binh Province. However, with the onset of the flu season, "suspected" AI cases reported in the press should be reviewed with suspicion. None of the cases reported in the media this week have yet been confirmed as AI-related. Two cases were later found to be AI negative by subsequent lab tests. The previous suspect case reported in Reftel, para 4 also tested negative for AI and is recovering.

#### Infections in Poultry Spread

13. (U) Bird flu in poultry was reported in four additional provinces this week, raising the total number of AI-affected cities and provinces in the current wave to 14. These include two provinces in the Mekong Delta in the south: Bac Lieu and Dong Thap; eight northern cities and provinces: Hanoi, Haiphong, Bac Giang, Hai Duong, Hung Yen, Ninh Binh, Vinh Phuc and Bac Ninh; and three central provinces: Thanh Hoa, Quang Nam and Quang Ngai. The total number of epidemic-affected communes rose to 85.

14. (U) Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Cao Duc Phat, warned of "belated discovery and surveillance of bird flu outbreaks in localities, as well as the people's negligence over the disease" at an AI meeting held in Hanoi on November 14. Prime Minister Phan Van Khai called for better dissemination of information on AI by the media, comprehensive poultry vaccination and tight surveillance at the village level. The National Steering Board for Bird Flu Control this week established nine delegations to inspect and monitor implementation of GVN instructions on AI prevention and control.

#### Testing on Possible H5N1 Virus Mutation

15. (SBU) The Vietnamese press reported that the Pasteur Institute of Ho Chi Minh City released information suggesting possible mutations in the H5N1 virus. Cao Bao Van, Director of the Molecular Biology Department of the Institute said that an analysis of 24 samples from a mix of animal specimens and human H5N1 cases from 2004 and early 2005 indicate some mutations and genetic drift. However, according to WHO Vietnam staff, the full data set has not been released to allow for an assessment as to whether findings are new or of concern. The Health Attache and ConGen HCMC are closely following this issue.

## Suspension of Home Grown Poultry in Cities

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16. (U) The GVN dramatically ramped up its already vigorous efforts to prevent an AI outbreak. In a country long accustomed to city dwellers raising chickens, suspension of small-scale poultry farming has been ordered in Hanoi, HCMC, Hue and Haiphong. The Vietnam News Agency (VNA) also reports that Hanoi's Steering Committee for Bird Flu Prevention will commence slaughter of all Hanoi's inner-city fowl in combination with a thorough inspection campaign beginning November 17. Even pet birds sold in cages have suddenly disappeared from Hanoi's streets. Farmers in bird flu-hit provinces have been ordered to cull fowl.

## Chicken on the Menu? Eggs for Breakfast?

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17. (U) Based on spot reports, Chicken is no longer to be seen in the "wet markets" or small shops throughout Hanoi. Vietnamese television news indicates that sale of "live" chicken is banned. Only a few restaurants still serve chicken. Chicken is available in some larger supermarkets, however, if obtained through Government-approved slaughterhouses. The GVN Ministry of Agriculture's Resolution on Emergency Measures to Prevent Avian Influenza dated November 4, 2005 (MOA Resolution) orders: "In cities and towns, only slaughtered/processed poultry can be sold; strictly ban the trade of live poultry or slaughtering of poultry in wet markets or places that do not meet criteria set by the Veterinary Law." The Vietnam News Agency reports that only certified-inspected poultry should be sold.

18. (SBU) Within the last three days, eggs also suddenly disappeared from Hanoi shops. Consular staff surveyed stores and found that eggs are largely unavailable in the capital and many restaurants have removed eggs from their breakfast selections. One storekeeper confided that she was hiding eggs in the back of her shop, because "the police are checking." The MOA Resolution states: "Diseased or un-inspected poultry/poultry products are not allowed to be traded or consumed." It appears local officials in Hanoi may be interpreting this restriction as applying to eggs.

19. (SBU) Like Hanoi, HCMC has stringently applied a ban on raising poultry in the city, with a compliance deadline of November 15. Press reports indicate that this has been 80 percent accomplished and is rapidly approaching 100 percent. There is also a ban on poultry entering HCMC. The Standing Vice Chairman of the HCMC People's Committee, who is in personal charge of these efforts, told the Consul General that he has made clear to the chairman of every district in the city that they will be held personally responsible for any AI outbreak among birds within their district.

## Tamiflu

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10. (SBU) Consular staff are regularly fielding questions from resident Americans as well as U.S. companies and NGOs based in Vietnam about how to procure Tamiflu. On October 14, the GVN confiscated a large shipment of Tamiflu from Roche intended for private medical and pharmaceutical providers. Vietnamese citizens are instructed via television and radio broadcasts not to purchase Tamiflu and that the Government will provide it free for anyone with flu symptoms. Pharmacies have been instructed not to sell Tamiflu without a prescription (although prescriptions are generally not required in Vietnam).

11. (SBU) A November 1 article on VietnamNet reported on black market sales by pharmacies of Tamiflu at inflated prices (approximately 63 USD per ten-pill package). Consular staff asked about availability of Tamiflu at several pharmacies. Some pharmacies denied holding stocks of Tamiflu, one offered Tamiflu only after the staff stated it was being purchased for an American company and two others said they would sell Tamiflu for 37 and 44 USD (for a ten-pill package), respectively.

## Vietnam Readies to Commence Human Vaccine Testing

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12. (SBU) Vietnam claims to be ready to pilot H5N1 vaccinations on volunteer vaccine researchers after successful testing on monkeys, according to the Hanoi-based Central Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology. The Vietnam-produced vaccine samples are now in the hands of the World Health Organization for analysis prior to human testing. The WHO has not approved the current vaccine for testing on humans, however.

## Poultry Inoculations Hastened

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13. (U) The National Steering Committee for Bird Flu

Prevention has required all localities across the country to step up poultry vaccination efforts in order to vaccinate 80 percent of the domestic fowls by late November 2005. Veterinary Department officials indicate that as many as 93 million poultry have been vaccinated nationwide to date.

14. (U) Extensive coverage of U.S. financial assistance to Vietnam in its effort to fight the spread of Avian Influenza (AI) both in animals and humans appeared in the press. Articles noted favorably that U.S. support to Vietnam AI prevention efforts for this year is expected to total USD 6.5 million. Several articles detailed aspects of the various projects that will be funded by HHS, USAID and USDA.

15. (U) On November 15, Regional Medical Technologist Cecil Dunn from Jakarta gave a lecture to the Embassy personnel on AI protection measures and how to prevent contracting the flu. Embassy Med Unit is also offering classes on home care for sick family member to staff.

Marine